

Westmeath Minotaurs American Football Club

Child Protection Policy

Compiled by the Committee of the
Westmeath Minotaurs

Content:

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Introduction:

Westmeath Minotaurs American Football Club is committed to providing children with a safe and child-centred environment in which the children can enjoy playing the sport of American Football. In order to promote this environment, the club recognises the need to identify and eliminate practices which could interfere with this aim. All sporting clubs, like the Minotaurs, who include children as members, are vulnerable to the crime of child abuse. Hence, the club seeks to create an awareness of child abuse, so that the club can effectively deal with incidences if they occur or stop the practice from happening in the first place. This approach is outlined in the policies contained within this paper.

Child welfare and the protection of young people is the concern of all adults at all times, irrespective of their role within the organisation. Each club and organisation must accept this as part of their responsibility and duty to care for young people. Research has shown that most abuse in childhood takes place at home and that sporting organisations are not, less likely or more likely, to cause or harbour abuse than any other aspect of society; but abuse of children is not specific to any one organisation or location, so adults need to be aware of its existence. The prevention and detection of child abuse depends on the collaborative effort of everyone concerned.

The prevention and detection of child abuse depends on the collaborative effort of everyone concerned. The following factors are central to effective child protection in sport:

- *acceptance by all involved with children that abuse, whether physical, emotional, neglect or sexual is wrong, severely damages children and must be confronted*
- *awareness of the behavioural and physical indicators of various forms of abuse*
- *knowledge of the appropriate response and action to be taken where abuse is revealed or suspected*
- *vigilance, and avoidance of all situations conducive to risk*
- *open, trusting and co-operative relationships within the club/organisation, and with parents/guardians and others concerned with children's progress or welfare*
- *willingness to co-operate with the Statutory Authorities (police authorities, health services executives or social services), in relation to sharing information about child protection concerns at any time*

Child Protection Policy

The purpose of this Child Protection Policy by Westmeath Minotaurs AFC is to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to protect from harm, those children and young people who participate in the clubs activities at all levels.

The policy establishes WMAFC's position, role and responsibilities and together with the Procedures Guidelines clarifies what is expected from all Coaches and individuals involved in the Club. It clearly highlights the importance placed by Westmeath Minotaurs on the protection of children and young people.

Every child and young person who plays American Football in Westmeath Minotaurs should be able to participate in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from abuse. This is the responsibility of every adult involved in the club. WMAFC recognises its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children and young people by protecting them from physical, sexual or emotional harm and from neglect or bullying.

Clear practices and procedures will ensure that everyone knows exactly what is expected of them in relation to the protection of children and young people involved in the club.

The key principles underpinning this Policy are that:

- 1)The child's welfare is, and must always be, the paramount consideration.**
- 2)All children and young people have a right to be protected from abuse regardless of their age, gender, disability, culture, language, racial origin, religious beliefs or sexual identity.**
- 3)All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.**

Child Abuse

Recognising and Reporting Abuse:

The ability to recognise child abuse depends as much on a person's willingness to accept the possibility of its existence as it does on knowledge and information. It is important to note that child abuse is not readily visible, and may not be as clearly observable as the text book' scenarios might suggest. If a Coach or a parent/guardian is uneasy about a child's safety or welfare they should talk to the designated person with responsibility for reporting within their club and/or duty social worker within the local health board.

Response to a child reporting any form of abuse

Where a child decides to disclose information to an adult or member of the club the following points should be taken into consideration:

- (a) It is important to deal with any allegation of abuse in a sensitive and competent way through listening to and facilitating the child to tell about the problem, rather than interviewing the child about details of what happened

- (b) It is important to stay calm and not to show any extreme reaction to what the child is saying. Listen compassionately, and take what the child is saying seriously
- (c) It should be understood that the child has decided to tell something very important and has taken a risk to do so. The experience of telling should be a positive one so that the child will not mind talking to those involved in the investigation
- (d) The child should understand that it is not possible that any information will be kept a secret
- (e) No judgmental statement should be made against the person whom the allegation is made
- (f) The child should not be questioned unless the nature of what s/he is saying is unclear. Leading questions should be avoided. Open, non-specific questions should be used such as "Can you explain to me what you mean by that"
- (g) It is advisable to check out the concerns with the parents/guardians before making a report unless during so would endanger the child. The child should be given some indication of what would happen next, such as informing parents/guardians, health board or social services. It should be kept in mind that the child may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable at this stage.

Reporting Child Abuse

The following steps should be taken in reporting child abuse to the statutory authorities:

- (a) Observe and note dates, times, locations and contexts in which the incident occurred or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information
- (b) Report the matter as soon as possible to the designated person with responsibility for reporting abuse (a senior officer holder, or the children's officer). If the Designated Person has reasonable grounds for believing that the child has been abused or is at risk of abuse, s/he will make a report to the health board/social services that have statutory responsibility to investigate and assess suspected or actual child abuse
- (c) In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the Designated Person is unable to contact a duty social worker, the police authorities should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities
- (d) If the Designated Person is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist s/he can informally consult with the local health board/social services. S/he will be advised whether or not the matter requires a formal report.
- (e) A Designated Person reporting suspected or actual child abuse to the Statutory Authorities should first inform the family of their intention to make such a report, unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine the investigation
- (f) A report should be given by the Designated Person to the Statutory Authorities in person by phone and in writing. See Appendix 6, page 53 of the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport, (sample reporting form).
- (g) It is best to report child abuse concerns by making personal contact with the relevant personnel in the Statutory Authorities.

(h) The Protection for Persons Reporting Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse "reasonably and in good faith" to a designated officer within the health board or any member of the guards.

Grounds for Concern

Consider the possibility of the need to make a report if there are reasonable grounds for concern.

Examples of reasonable grounds are:

- A specific indication from a child that s/he has been abused, (a disclosure)
- A statement from a person who witnessed abuse
- An illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse
- A symptom which may not itself be totally consistent with abuse, but which is supported by corroborative evidence of deliberate harm or negligence, (e.g., & broken arm results from a fall but this injury re-occurs through constant lack of supervision)
- Consistent signs of neglect over a period of time

Categories of Abuse

All Sports Leaders should be familiar with signs and behaviours that may be indicative of child abuse. Though a child may be subjected to more than one type of harm, abuse is normally categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. For detailed definitions of abuse refer to Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Health & Children) and Cooperating to Protect Children (Volume 6 of the Children (NI) Order regulations). The categories of abuse may be summarised as follows:

Child Neglect

Neglect is normally defined in terms of omission, where a child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, or medical care. It may also include neglect of a child's basic emotional needs.

Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period of time rather than at one specific point. For instance, a child who suffers a series of minor injuries is not having his or her needs for supervision and safety met. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well being and /or development is severely affected

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between an adult and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. It is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms. For children with disabilities it may include over protection or conversely failure to recognise or understand a child's disability,

Examples of emotional abuse include:

(a) Persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming;

- (b) Where the level of care is conditional on his or her behaviour
- (c) Unresponsiveness, inconsistent or unrealistic expectations of a child;
- (d) Premature imposition of responsibility on the child
- (e) Over and under protection of the child
- (f) Failure to provide opportunities for the child's education and development
- (g) Use of unrealistic or over-harsh disciplinary measures
- (h) Exposure to domestic violence; adult mental health problems and parental

Substance misuse may expose children to emotional abuse. Children show signs of emotional abuse by their behaviour for example, excessive clinginess to or avoidance of the parent/guardian, their emotional state (low self-esteem, unhappiness), or their development (non-organic failure to thrive). The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and the parent/guardian. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury that causes significant harm to the child, including:

- (a) Shaking, hitting or throwing
- (b) Use of excessive force in handling
- (c) Deliberate poisoning
- (d) Suffocation or drowning
- (e) Munchausen's syndrome by proxy (where parents/guardians fabricate stories of illness about their child or cause physical signs of illness)
- (f) Allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child
- (g) For children with disabilities it may include confinement to a room or cot, or incorrectly given drugs to control behaviour
- (h) Burning or scalding

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others. For example:

- (a) Exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child
- (b) Intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification
- (c) Masturbation in the presence of a child or involvement of the child in the act of masturbation
- (d) Sexual intercourse with the child, whether oral, vaginal or anal

(e) Sexual exploitation of a child. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Some facts about abuse:

- Abuse occurs across all social classes, education, professions and ethnic groups
- Children and young people mostly know and trust their abuser
- A child will rarely be moved from the home, it's usual to remove the abuser from the situation
- Both boys and girls are abused.
- Disabled children are more vulnerable to abuse, less able to speak about it and more dependent on adults and their carer's.

Anti-Bullying Policy

What is Bullying?

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression be it verbal, psychological or physical conduct by an individual or group against others. It is behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating and occurs mainly in social environments such as schools, clubs and other organisations working with children and young people. It includes behaviours such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting and extortion by one or more children against a victim.

Is Bullying harmful?

Persistent bullying can have a devastating effect on a child's self esteem. They may feel it's somehow their fault, or that there's something wrong with them, they may become withdrawn and insecure, more cautious, and less willing to take any sort of risk. Being victimised in this way can cause days of mental anguish and leave lifelong emotional scars. It has driven some young people to try to murder their tormentors and others to suicide. A child who has suffered bullying often needs professional counselling to let out their feelings and rebuild their self-confidence. Bullying also affects any child who witnesses it,

What do children get bullied about?

Some of the factors involved in bullying include:

- Puberty
- Peer pressure
- Gender differences
- Stereotypes/prejudice
- Structure of the group - hierarchy of dominance
- Family background of victims and bullies

Bullying can be distinguished from sassiness and boisterous play. A bossy child will boss whoever is around. So often it is due to lack of self-control or skills of negotiation or compromise. Boisterous play can be dangerous but it does not involve young people wilfully setting out to hurt or victimise. Young

people often grow out of this kind of behaviour as they grow older. What distinguishes bullying from bossiness or boisterousness is that the bully always picks on someone less powerful and more vulnerable. Persistent 'slagging', which has the same, devastating effects as bullying, shouldn't be ignored.

How would you know if a child is being bullied?

All bullies operate using furtiveness, threats and fear. Bullying can therefore only survive in an environment where the victim does not feel empowered to tell someone who can help or in which it is not safe to do so.

The following indicators are warning signs that a young person might be getting bullied.

- Reluctance to come to a centre or take part in activities.
- Physical signs (unexplained bruises, scratches, or damage to belongings)
- Stress-caused illness - headaches, and stomach aches which seem unexplained
- Fearful behaviour (fear of walking to scout meeting, going different routes, asking to be driven)
- Frequent loss of 'subs' or shortage of money with vague explanations
- Having few friends
- Changes in behaviour (withdrawn, stammering, moody, irritable, upset, distressed)
- Not eating
- Attempting suicide or hinting at suicide
- Anxiety (shown by nail-biting, tearfulness, tics)
- There are other possible reasons for many of the above

What makes a person bully others?

Bullies are often making a plea for help through their violent behaviour, which may reflect a sense of insignificance. Bullies whose activities go un-addressed often fail socially and academically in later life. They need to be taught all important negotiation and co-operative skills, working with others rather than competing.

Who should deal with bullying?

While the more extreme forms of bullying would be regarded as physical or emotional abuse and are reported to the health board or An Garda Síochána, dealing with bullying behaviour is normally the responsibility of the organisation where it is taking place.

How can it be prevented?

An Anti-Bullying Policy and Code should be drawn up and enforced and procedures should be clearly established to deal with any incidents. While it is important to have rules about bullying, a whole group policy is the best solution. This means not 'bullying the bully' but working with bullies and the group of young people, helping them to understand the hurt they are causing, and so make the problem a 'shared concern' of the group. Group discussion methods have a big advantage over punishment in that they do not drive the problem underground or escalate it by making the bully more excluded or more of a social failure. This is known as the "No blame approach" (see below)

Are there any practical steps that can be used to counter bullying?

- Use young people as a positive resource in countering bullying and to change the culture of the group to a permission to tell culture rather than a 'might be right' one
- Teach young people to negotiate, co-operate and help others, particularly new or different children

- It's a good idea to run poster campaigns and have stories and role-plays on how to deal with a bully included in ordinary group activities '
- Offer the victim immediate support and put the 'no blame approach' into operation
- Never tell a young person to ignore bullying, they can't ignore it, it hurts too much
- Never encourage a young person to take the law into their own hands and beat the bully at their own game
- Tell the victim there is nothing wrong with them and it is not their fault

What is the 'No Blame' Approach?

Step 1 - Interview with the victim

If you find that there has been an incident of bullying, first talk to the victim. At this stage find out who was involved and what the victim is now feeling. Try asking the following questions:

- 1) Was it verbal or physical intimidation?
- 2) How hurt is the victim
- 3) Was it within his/her own peer group?
- 4) Ensure the victim that his/her name will not come out in the investigation
- 5) Actively listen

Step 2 - Meet with all involved

Arrange to meet with all those involved; this should include some bystanders, those who may have colluded, those joined in and those who initiated the bullying.

- 1) Just have a maximum of six to eight in the group - keep the number controllable
- 2) Make a point of calling a 'special' meeting
- 3) Ensure the severity of the topic is understood by all
- 4) Speak only of the hurt caused in general terms with no reference to the victim

Play on the conscience of all - ask questions like: How would you feel? Would you like 'it done to you?

Step 3 - Explain the problem

The distress being suffered as a result of the bullying incident is explained. At this stage the details of the incident or the allocation of the blame is not discussed. Explain the feelings of loneliness, feeling left out, rejected, laughed at. Try asking questions:

- 1) Would they like it if it happened to them
- 2) "Someone here in this group was bullied by someone within the group, what could we do to see it does not happen again?"

3) Listen, watch out for reactions, and pick up on any without isolating anyone

Step 4 - Share the responsibility

Explain what steps / controls may have to be introduced to prevent further incidents and how everyone will lose out as a result

Step 5 - Ask the group for their ideas

At this stage the group is encouraged to suggest ways that would make the victim feel happier. All positive responses are noted. Use phrases "if it were you" to encourage a response. Listen to all suggestions and note them

Step 6 - Leave it to them

Now the problem has been identified, solutions suggested, the problem is now handed over to the group to solve. Arrange to meet again in a week's time. Pass responsibility over to the group and give a time frame within which something must be done

Step 7 - Meet them again

Each member of the group, including the bully, discusses how things are going, who is doing what and have there been other incidents. This allows for continual monitoring and also keeps all involved in the process. Again enforce the idea of the team' looking after each other at regular intervals to ensure it is known that bullying or intimidating behaviour will not be tolerated.

References:

Irish Sports Council Code of Ethics